

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*: a new species for sub-Saharan Africa

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Les auteurs rapportent les observations d'un Bécasseau de l'Anadyr *Calidris tenuirostris* au West Coast National Park, au nord de Cape Town, Afrique du Sud, en décembre 2000, mars–avril 2002 et octobre 2002–mars 2003. L'oiseau (probablement le même individu) a été filmé en vidéo; il était parfois partiellement ou presque entièrement en plumage nuptial. En Afrique l'espèce avait déjà été signalée du Maroc (en août 1980) et de Djibouti (en février 2001). Quelques aspects de l'identification de l'espèce en plumage internuptial sont examinés.

Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* breeds in north-east Siberia and winters from Australasia west to Pakistan, with scattered records in the Middle East². Here we report on Africa's first sub-Saharan record, discussing its identification with reference to photographic evidence acquired over two winter seasons. Prior to this sighting, the only mainland African record was of an adult at Agadir, Morocco on 27 August 1980⁵, although another has apparently since been discovered, in Djibouti, in February 2001⁶.

On 24 December 2000, we located a suspected Great Knot from the Seeberg hide in West Coast National Park, Langebaan, c100 km north of Cape Town, South Africa. The bird, in non-breeding plumage, was foraging on *Zostera*-dominated tidal mudflats alongside Red Knots *C. canutus*. Its identification was not confirmed at the time. Almost 15 months later (on 18 March–30 April 2002), a Great Knot showing similar features was found by T Hardaker, J Graham and V Head at exactly the same locality. In this instance, the bird was in partial breeding plumage, as were the associated Red Knots, prior to northward migration. We were able to obtain digital video images of these birds using a Sony digital camcorder (Zeiss 10x lens) magnified through a Kowa TSN1 telescope (30x wide angle lens) and these are presented here. Subsequently, there were a few sight records of a Great Knot in the same place for a third consecutive season (17 October 2002–29 March 2003; M Mills, T Hardaker, T Gous, A Hester and B van

der Walt), presumably involving the same individual. During the earlier part of the season the bird was in almost full breeding plumage.

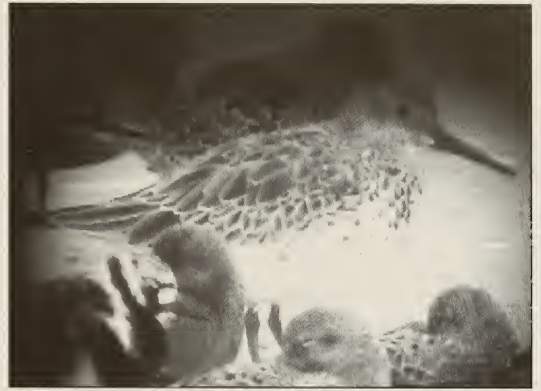
Though it is highly distinctive among *Calidris* species in breeding plumage, in non-breeding plumage Great Knot closely resembles Red Knot^{1–3,5}. We reviewed our field observations and video footage from December 2000 in an attempt to confirm the identification of the bird (in non-breeding plumage) as a Great Knot. In direct comparison to the surrounding Red Knots, its larger size and substantially longer and deeper based bill (Fig 1) were striking. It also had heavily streaked upperparts (Fig 2), especially on the crown and hindneck (Figs 1, 3). The supercilium was partially obscured in front of the eye by the large diffuse loreal patch, and the supercilium was weaker behind the eye than a typical Red Knot (Figs 1–3). The arrowhead streaking on the flanks was less extensive and darker than in Red Knot (Fig 2) and there was distinct black spotting on the breast-sides (Figs 1–2), though the video from March 2002 demonstrates this spotting to be much more extensive, as the bird had begun to acquire its breeding plumage (Figs 4–5). In addition, the bird possessed a marked primary projection beyond the tail. Though we were initially cautious in reaching conclusions, this combination of features confirms the December 2000 bird as a Great Knot and is probably the same individual as recorded subsequently.



Figures 1–3. Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, West Coast National Park, Langebaan, South Africa, December 2000 (Callan Cohen)

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Figures 4–5. Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*, West Coast National Park, Langebaan, South Africa, March 2002 (Callan Cohen)

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